

Strange Fruit, Analyzing the Lyrics

Handout 1 ***Strange Fruit, Analyzing the Lyrics***

Media Literacy

1. What is the message of the song?
2. What is the purpose of the song (is it to instruct, inform, persuade, argue, explain, entertain, or a combination)?
3. How do you know what the message or purpose is, that is, what elements contribute to the message (pay attention to the form of media, arrangement of music and lyrics, emotion, delivery, rhythm and language)?
4. Who is the intended audience of the song?
5. The original song writer was a Jewish American teacher named Abel Meeropol (pen name Lewis Allan). Knowing this and the fact that Billie Holiday was a Black Jazz singer, does this affect how you respond to the respective renditions of the song? Do the message, purpose and intended audience of the different versions change?

Content of the lyrics

1. What are the “strange” fruit? Why is it that Southern trees bear “strange” fruit?
2. What kind of fruit do trees usually bear? Explain the cycle of a fruit-bearing tree and compare it to the “strange” fruit-bearing tree.
3. What is ironic about the words “gallant South” and the South that bears “strange” fruit?
4. You will notice that the word “lynching” never appears in the song-why? Is the song more or less effective because the message is implied instead of stated?

Content of the music

1. In what genre does Billy Holiday’s arrangement fit?
2. What is “blue” or sad about the song? Is there anything joyous about the song? Analyze the relationship between the music and the lyrics- rhythm, tempo, vocal style, instrumentation, arrangement and delivery.